

Rocky Mills  
Ashland Vicinity  
Hanover County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-146

HABS  
VA  
43-ASH.V,  
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ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Prepared at Headquarters Office for  
Virginia district

ADDENDUM

Rocky Mills (Reconstructed House)  
Henrico County, Richmond Vicinity  
Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Virginia

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Eugene Bradbury, Architect in Charge  
Grace Securities Building, Richmond, Virginia

ROCKY MILLS (Residence)  
Ashland Vicinity, Hanover County, Virginia

Owner: Dr. Preston (of reconstructed house)

Date of Erection: c.1750

Architect: Unknown

Builder: John Syme (owner)

Present Condition:

Number of Stories: Two and basement

Materials of Construction: Brick (flemish bond), stone trim

Other Existing Records: None known

Additional Data: The land on which the house stood before it was moved to Richmond, was granted to John Syme about 1725. In 1727 land was granted him, and others, on the River Byrd in Hanover County, in addition to land already granted (Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXXII, p.375). Syme came to this country from Scotland sometime before 1722 when he was elected a Burgess. He died in 1731 and his widow married Col. John Henry and became the mother of Patrick Henry. John Syme II was a minor at his father's death. About 1750 he married Mildred Merriweather and after her death Sarah Hoops. He was a Burgess from 1752 on, and a member of the Revolutionary Convention of 1775-6.

Rocky Mills mansion was probably built about the time of John Syme Second's first marriage. It stood until 1928 when it was demolished and rebuilt in the Westhampton section of Richmond by Mr. Frederick Nolt-ing. The architect was Luis Duhring of Philadelphia, from whom much of the accompanying information was obtained. After its rebuilding the house was named Bel Pré, and after its resale to Dr. Preston, changed to Fairfield. In the rebuilding the pavillion on the rear elevation was slightly projected, whereas formerly it had been flush. The pediment now in place had been removed at one time, but all of the trim was left in the attic and was reused. The porch is also an addition

and is a copy of one at Kenmore at Fredericksburg. The house was increased slightly in depth to allow the introduction of bath rooms on the second floor.

Description of woodwork from photographs taken before the removal to Richmond:

Room 1, West Wall: Full height fluted Doric Pilasters supporting wide frieze (no architrave) and dentiled cornice, bed mould only breaking around the pilasters. Pilasters occur at either side of mantel with half pilasters in each corner. Mantel marble, period of c.1820. Doors between outer pilasters are six panel with moulded architraves eared at top and bottom. The overdoor has frieze and broken pediment, The former is interrupted by two archaic triglyphs. All walls have a sheathed dado with well moulded cap and base which return on themselves where they abut verticals.

South Wall: Center door of large size, six panel (probably c.1820 with flat fielded panels) with fully moulded architrave, not eared. This is flanked by attenuated fluted Doric pilasters which support a delicately moulded pediment. The pediment rake has crenelated dentils and the entablature plain, but very long dentils. There is no frieze or architrave over the pilasters, but between the top of the door trim and the soffit of the cornice is a boarded space, enriched by a band of wall of Troy fret work. The main cornice continues across this wall, but the frieze under is reduced one half.

East Wall: The two windows in this wall have paneled interior shutters, splayed at about 60°. The panels are arranged with a short panel at the top and one in the center dividing two long panels. The head has two panels. The panel moulds have bead and bevel profiles. The windows are surrounded by full architraves eared at the top. Abutting the ears are curious panel strips simulating brackets, tying the window motive to the cornice, which breaks out over the whole design. There is a plain plaster panel between the cornice and window head. Below the window runs the sheathed dado, carrying around the splayed jamb without any breaks. In the reveal is built a window seat, which projects slightly from the face of the dado. The base carries around it and the chair rail is used also as the window seat mould.

North Wall: Similar to east wall but with only one window.

Room 2: This room is entirely of the c.1820 period. The mantel is of variegated marble with grouved pilasters and brackets. There is no dado and the plaster cornice is of very flattened profile with triple bands on the ceiling and a frieze below. The windows have slightly splayed paneled jambs, the reveal extending to the floor without a window seat. There are three equal panels in the height of the window and one panel below the stool, which is well moulded. There are two

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soffit panels in the head. The face trim is the typical Empire sunk moulded section having corner blocks with turned centers. There is a narrow cap in lieu of a cornice. The same trim is used for the door and the door matches that in Room No. 1.

Room 3: The east wall is entirely covered with wood, the lower part paneled, the upper sheathed. The fireplace is in the center, surrounded by a simple and small scale roll moulding. Above it is a long broad panel with a moulded shelf planted on it and above two short narrow panels. The tops of these latter line with the tops of the closet doors on either side. These latter are separated from the mantel by very narrow fluted pilasters, the fluting of which is interrupted for about ten inches slightly above the middle. The doors are six panel, with pronouncedly horizontal top panels and delicate panel moulds. They are surrounded by the same profile roll moulding as used on the fireplace. There is space between the pilasters and door trim for a narrow vertical panel above the sheathed dado, which repeats on the other side of the door. Above the line of the top of the door trim and the overmantel panels, the wall area is divided into three large panels which are filled with horizontal sheathing. Above is a narrow and shallow, but fully moulded cornice which breaks around the pilasters, thereby forming their cap with a narrow necking below. There is no record of the other walls in this room.

Room 4: The treatment of the East wall of this room is similar to that of Room 3, except that the greater length allows wider panels at either end, and a narrow panel at either side of the fireplace trim. The fluting of the pilasters here is continuous. There is no further record of this room.

Hall: The east hall has a sheathed dado and a full cornice. At the west end the cornice becomes a full Doric entablature with triglyphs small medallions occurring in the metopes. This is supported by  $3/4$  Doric pilasters set against the corner. Probably not original is a high segmental arch with moulded imposts paneled archivolt and fluted key that is cut into the entablature in a very unfortunate way. On either side of the hall are doors leading to Rooms Nos. 1 and 2. These have full architraves (the reveal filled with a later paneling), full Doric pilasters below a pediment which is enriched with triglyphs and dentils. Both in the minor and major orders used in the hall, the lower section of the fluting is filled with reeding.

The Stair Hall: On the west wall is the entrance door between two windows. The door is two valve, three panels in each, but the paneled and splayed jambs do not correspond and have paneling corresponding to the window jambs in Room 1. The face trim of the door is an architrave worked with a guilloche. This seems to be also used in a narrow frieze

above, upon which rests a rather delicately moulded pediment. The flanking north windows are treated like that in Room 1, except that the architrave is eared at both top and bottom and above it is a pulvinated frieze and cornice. The west face of the arch to the east hall is similar to the east face. The dentil course here as opposite is of interlacing semicircles, rather like guilloche ornament. The stair ascends the south wall in three flights but all of its trim is of the period c.1820, with open stringer, strap work brackets, thin widely spaced balusters and sinuous circular handrail with scrolled terminal.

Upper West Hall: In the west wall is a range of three windows simply trimmed. The window seats are like those in Room 1 with more delicate mouldings, the architrave has no crossettes, and the paneled jambs lack the middle horizontal panel. The cornice is fully moulded with dentils and a narrow plaster board below. The dado is sheathed with light cap and base. On the east wall is an arch motive similar to that below but narrower, and it lacks the paneled archivolt, though retaining the paneled jambs. The small medallions in the metopes are missing. The return of the entablature does not line with the face of the pilaster below, projecting as far as the edge of the cap. The east hall lacks the dado but retains the full cornice and has six panel doors with full architraves. The east door has a six light transom over, framed by a continuation of the door trim.

Room 9: The east wall contains the Palladian window, curiously and ungrammatically framed. The whole motive is spanned by a segmental arch with architrave and fluted key. The sidelights are separated from the center window by narrow deeply projecting pilasters, run with three flutes. These rest on the window seat and support paneled spandrels over. These occur only over the sidelights, the head of the center reveal being formed by the main segmental arch. The sidelights are the only original window sash in the building, except the arched transom of the Palladian window which shows the original sash were four lights wide.

Room 5: In the west wall the mantel of the 1820 period is of wood, but in design follows the marble mantel in Room 2. It has a marble facing. It is framed by a pair of attenuated fluted pilasters like those in Room 4, but there is no paneling in this central area except a single section of paneled dado between the pilaster and mantel, almost 3'4" high. In the flanking areas the doors (the left being a dummy) are pushed away from the fireplace motive toward the side walls. The doors are modern four panel doors, but have the same roll moulding trim as Rooms 3 and 4. Between the doors and the pilasters occur paneled sections of a single panel above a sheathed dado, the height of the door trim and about 2'6" wide. There is a narrow

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cornice at the ceiling line with breaks out around the pilasters forming their caps. The south wall has a six panel door (flat panels) in the center with a full architrave around it. There is a sheathed dado with simple cap and base and a narrow cornice. The two windows in the east wall and the single in the north are similar to those in the west wall of the upper stair hall.

Room 6: The three outside walls of this room are similar to those of Room 5, except that a fully moulded cornice exists. The west wall has a mantel similar to that in Room 5, but the wall is otherwise perfectly plain plaster, except for the sheathed dado and a pair of six panel doors (the left hand one a dummy) with architraves.

Room 7: The west wall has a six panel door at the extreme right with architrave trim, which abuts a simple paneled mantelpiece. This latter has a narrow moulded fireplace trim with vertical panels flanking it. Above in a large panel frame is an area of horizontal sheathing, extending to the height of the top of the door trim. Around the mantel motive is a narrow moulded trim. Planted on the large panel is a moulded mantel shelf. This room has a sheathed dado with simply moulded cap and base. The fireplace opening is arched.

Room 8: In the east wall the wall treatment is similar to that of Room 5, but lacks the later mantel and possesses one long broad horizontal panel over, below two short narrow panels. These come to the line of the top of the doors and above are large paneled sheathed areas as in Rooms 3 and 4. The fireplace opening is arched.

In the writer's opinion there are three periods in the development of the present trim. The first is of the date of building c.1750; two c.1780 and three c.1820. This is borne out by the different panel moulds employed. To the first can be assigned the window and door jamb panels (except in Room 2) and the face trim, but without the panel bracket strips of Room 1, also perhaps the frieze and cornice of the hall. The pedimented doorways in the east hall (except the paneled reveals) the great pilasters and the Doric entablature, minus the oval medallions seem to be of the first period. From the fact that the window panel mould is a bead and bevel and that of the hall arches is bead filet and bevel makes it seem that the arches are introductions (below the flat head) of c.1780. In Room 1 the south doorway and perhaps the west door trims would seem to be c.1780. The main cornice is probably original though an architrave mould at one time perhaps cut the present wide frieze into two members. The walls of this room may have been paneled once between the pilasters.

All of the paneling in Rooms 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 would seem to be c.1780 on account of the bead, filet and bevel panel mould. Just which

doors are original it is hard to say, but probably almost only that to Room 9. The period of the window trim here is questionable, but probably is c.1780. The pediment of the main west door, and perhaps the surface trim is of this same period.

The c.1820 changes include the new stair trim, Room 2, the mantels in Rooms 5 and 6, and the doors and paneled jambs in the east lower hall.

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